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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the need to diversify the education profession at practitioner, administrative, and personnel preparation levels in order to better serve culturally and linguistically diverse children with disabilities. Needs identified include developing effective recruitment and retention programs for members of ethnic minority groups; ensuring that competencies related to culturally and linguistically diverse children with handicaps are an integral component of special education and related services preparation programs; strengthening training and leadership programs preparing ethnic minority special education and related services personnel as well as personnel serving culturally and linguistically diverse children with handicaps; and initiating research and demonstration projects to improve curriculum, competencies, and training. (JDD)

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Preparing Special Education and Related Services Personnel To Serve Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children with Handicaps: Needs and Future Directions

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The preparation of special education and related services personnel to serve culturally and linguistically diverse children with disabilities is a major challenge confronting the profession as the United States increasingly becomes more ethnically diverse. As the cadre of Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native educators has declined there has been growing attention to diversifying the education profession at practitioning, administrative, and personnel preparation levels.

Defining the Issues and Identifying Alternative Solutions

Relative to the preparation of personnel to work with culturally diverse infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities the following needs have emerged.

* Expand the pool of educators at direct service and leadership levels who are members of ethnic minority groups.

* Develop effective recruitment and retention programs and strategies related to individuals who are members of ethnic minority groups.

* Insure that competencies related to culturally and linguistically diverse children with handicaps are an integral component of special education and related services preparation programs.

* Strengthen training and leadership programs preparing ethnic minority special education and related services personnel as well as personnel serving culturally and linguistically diverse children with handicaps.

* Initiate research and demonstrations to improve curriculum, competencies, and training in terms of culturally and linguistically diverse children withdisabilities.

Ethnic Minority Personnel Concern for cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity throughout education is important in terms of equity and access to attractive role models (Pine & Hilliard, 1990). A diverse public school, college or university, or state or federal department of education has significance for all

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students and educators and the importance of such role models will grow as the population in the United States continues to change.

In contrast to steadily increasing culturally and linguistically diverse public school enrollment, the number of minority teachers is declining. In 1987 the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, using U. S. Department of Education statistics, reported that:

* Black students represented 16.2% of the children in public schools, however, only 6.9% of the teachers were Black.

* Hispanic students comprised 9.1% of the public school population, but Hispanics accounted for only 1.9% of the teachers.

* Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native children represented 2.5% and 0.9% of the children in public school, while the proportion of teachers who were Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native was 0.9% and 0.6% respectively.

With respect to the future the Quality Education for Minorities Project (1990) projects:

> Over the next decade, when the minority student population in schools will exceed the present 30 percent and will approach 50 percent in most urban areas, minority teachers are expected to decline from the current 10 percent of the overall teacher work force to just 5 percent. Fewer than 8 percent of the students in teacher preparation programs are minority, and this pool is likely to be cut in half by the candidates' subsequent failure to pass teacher competency tests for licensing in most states. (p. 40)

Special education and related service programs face the same challenge as other segments of education in terms of greater cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity. For example, between 1972 and 1986 the proportion of minority members of the American Speech Language and Hearing Association increased from 1% to nearly 4%, well below the proportion of minorities in the general population (Cola, 1987). A survey of faculties at institutions belonging to the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education reported that 7% of the full professors, 11% of the associate professors and 3% of assistant professors were minority (Smith & Lovett, 1987). The trend toward few minorities at the entry level in higher education is alarming in view of the need for increased diversity of special education faculties.

Increasing the number of special education and related services personnel who are members of ethnic, cultural, and

racial minority groups is a long term imperative. This challenge requires a long term commitment on the part of the professionals, as well as policy makers and administrators at local, state, and federal levels. In the past this area has been of temporal, minimal interest; however, experience indicates that progress will require continual attention, and a willingness to make improvements dependent upon the effectiveness of programs, projects, and other activities.

Strategies to improve ethnic, cultural, and racial representation within special education and related service areas needs to encompass all areas of disability as well as ethnic minority groups. Addressing this area will require simultaneous attention to each of the various types of handicapping conditions, professional positions, (e.g., teacher, administrator, diagnostician), and ethnic minority groups, (i.e., Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native). As with low incidence populations in special education the smaller ethnic minority groups are many times overlooked because of their small number and geographic distribution. Likewise, areas of special education such as early intervention and early childhood also need to be included.

Programmatic efforts to improve minority representation within special education and related service areas needs to be accompanied by ongoing data collection and reporting. Presently, data that is available in this area is generally not differentiated according to area or level of special education, position, or by ethnic minority group. Such information would provide a means for determining progress as well as basis for future planning.

Recruitment and Retention. Renewed attention to attracting cultural, racial, and ethnic individuals into education and related fields has led to increased recruitment and retention attention. Proposals to improve recruitment and retention of minorities have included national and state scholarships, high school and college work-study programs, articulation programs between two-year and four-year institutions, various forms of financial assistance, incentives to enter and remain in teaching, re-entry and career change training, and examination of state and national teaching assessment programs (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1987).

At a time when education is committing greater attention and resources to recruitment and retention strategies, recruitment requirements associated with federal grants to prepare special education and related services personnel have been substantially weakened. In the late 1980s, the U. S. Department of Education amended regulatory provisions requiring grant recipients to provide a description of how the institution of higher education or state education agency would provide equal access and treatment for eligible project participants who were members of traditionally underrepresented groups, (e.g., racial or ethnic

minority groups, persons with disabilities). The new requirements call for an assurance that the applicant does not discriminate in terms of project participants. Provisions relating to the employment of project personnel were amended in a similar fashion. These regulatory amendments were viewed by professional organizations, such as The Council for Exceptional Children, and advocacy groups as a policy reversal and a substantial retreat from requirements calling for affirmative steps to encourage individuals who are members of racial and ethnic minority groups and persons with disabilities to become special education teachers, administrative as well as related services personnel.

The suggestions which follow are for improved recruitment and retention of culturally and ethnically diverse individuals into special education and related services fields.

Reestablish, and where appropriate, strengthen regulatory requirements requiring that affirmative steps be undertaken by recipients of federal personnel preparation grants to recruit individuals who are members of ethnic and racial minority groups as well as individuals with disabilities. To ensure that serious attention is given to the development and implementation of this component of the application, consideration should be given to attaching a numerical value to this part of the application in the review process.

Information and data relating to successful recruitment and retention programs, practices and activities, in special education and related service areas, need to be collected, evaluated, and disseminated to the field. While special education may or may not benefit from recruitment and retention efforts aimed at overall education, meaningful ways for special education to relate to these programs and activities need to be determined. The National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education could play a central role in collecting, reporting, and disseminating successful recruitment and retention programs and strategies in special education.

Other suggestions related to recruitment and retention include:

* Early recruitment at the secondary school and undergraduate levels.

* Identification of barriers in the completion of degree requirements.

* Importance and role of support systems such as peer and cohort groups and mentors in student retention.

* Improving the image and appeal of education, including special education and related service areas, to culturally diverse students.

Inclusion of Cultural and Linguistic Knowledge and Skills Within Training Programs. Rapidly changing demographics have intensified the need for professional educational programs to include relevant course content on culturally and linguistically diverse children. The Council for Exceptional Children Standards for Professional Practice (1983) include multicultural education requirements for both basic and advanced special education personnel preparation programs.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (1987) has recommended four alternative curriculum approaches (i.e., pyramid, unit, infusion and courses), to promote the inclusion of content on culturally and linguistically diverse populations within professional training programs. In addition to academic preparation, such programs should include practicum experience with culturally diverse children. For programs with limited access to multicultural populations for practicum purposes other experiences will need to be provided.

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